



# Brownfields Showcase Community Niagara Region, NY

Outreach and Special Projects Staff (5105)

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

*Brownfields are abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial properties where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived contamination. In May 1997, Vice President Gore announced a Brownfields National Partnership to bring together the resources of more than 15 federal agencies to address local cleanup and reuse issues in a more coordinated manner. In 1998, this multi-agency partnership designated 16 "Brownfields Showcase Communities"—models demonstrating the benefits of collaborative activity on brownfields. In October 2000, the partnership selected 12 additional "Brownfields Showcase Communities" to continue the success of the initiative. The Brownfields Showcase Communities are distributed across the country and vary by size, resources, and community type. A wide range of support will be leveraged, depending on the particular needs of each Showcase Community.*

## BACKGROUND

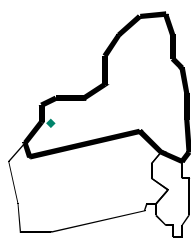
The Brownfields National Partnership has selected the Niagara Region in New York as a Brownfields Showcase Community. The Niagara Region—including the Counties of Niagara and Erie and the Cities of Niagara Falls and Buffalo—is home to more than 1.2 million people and has a significant industrial legacy. The area contains declining industrial communities and rural and suburban townships, all of which contain brownfields sites. Population loss, economic stagnation, a weak real estate market, and a high concentration of sites with environmental contamination make this area one of the country's most distressed regions. Currently more than 40 percent of the population in Buffalo and Niagara Falls lives below the poverty level. The Niagara Region is among the bottom 10 percent of the 100 largest U.S. cities in terms of household income, unemployment, and people on public

assistance. Minorities account for 33 percent of the population in the region, and the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls have unemployment rates of 8.6 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively.

Highlights of targeted sites include the 1,200-acre South Buffalo Redevelopment Area and 1,150 unused acres of the Bethlehem Steel Plant in Erie County. The South Buffalo Redevelopment Area includes more than 3 million square feet of proposed development space and promotes the creation of approximately 4,500 to 10,500 new jobs. Public investment in the project is approximately \$45 to \$65 million. The Bethlehem Steel Plant calls for developing the

unused portion of its property into a home for light and heavy industries, distribution businesses, and recreational uses. Habitat restoration will also be initiated. Bethlehem Steel has pledged \$5 million to help prepare the site, whereas Erie County has committed \$1 million to upgrade the site's infrastructure.

### Community Profile



Niagara Region, New York

The Niagara Region Brownfields Coalition is a unique regional collaboration whose members include Niagara and Erie Counties, the Cities of Niagara Falls and Buffalo, a public university, and a statewide development agency. The Coalition is targeting cleanup and redevelopment efforts in several large areas, including the 1,200-acre South Buffalo Redevelopment Area and 1,150 unused acres of the Bethlehem Steel Plant in Erie County.

## CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Three of the Coalition partners are EPA Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilots—Niagara County and the Cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. Coalition members, such as the Niagara Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund Pilot and the Western New York Brownfields Training Initiative, are already working together in various brownfields efforts. The Coalition also includes three New York State Economic Development Zones—the Cities of Niagara Falls, Buffalo, and Lackawanna in Erie County. In addition, the City of Buffalo has also been designated a Federal Enterprise Community. Approximately 5,000 new jobs could result from this venture.

The rivers and watersheds targeted by the Niagara Region have been designated by the U.S.-Canada International Joint Commission as “areas of concern” based on environmental impairments, such as poor water and sediment quality. Degradation has been linked to fish and wildlife habitats, so advisories have been issued in the region in order to minimize public exposure to contaminants.

Because the Coalition recognizes the area’s abundance of fresh water resources and its strategic location for binational commerce, it is concentrating its efforts on brownfields redevelopment as the key strategy for economic regeneration and environmental revitalization. The Coalition has worked with EPA, the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, Empire State Development, and other federal and state agencies to create a Niagara River Park linking brownfields redevelopment with the

natural, economic, and cultural resources of the watershed. Another international collaboration is that of the International Brownfields Exchange, where the Coalition has partnered with the Waterfront Regeneration Trust of Ontario, Environment Canada, EPA, the German Marshall Fund, and other local partners to build on recent initiatives and progress in the region to articulate a vision for the future that translates into concrete action, emphasizing sustainable brownfields development, and ecological and economic restoration.

The Coalition has identified and utilized tax incentives, low-interest loans, and other financing tools for businesses and developers. For example, the local governments have initiated 13 projects that have brownfields cleanup funding available through the New York State Clean Air/Clean Water Bond Act.

The Coalition has formed partnerships with federal, state, and local entities to address brownfields issues. A few of the partnerships include:

- EPA, which awarded Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilots to Niagara County and the Cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls with supplemental awards going to the two cities;
- Standard Ceramics, who has invested more than \$700,000 and created 12 new jobs at a former Union Carbide facility; and
- Empire State Development and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which have, under the direction of Niagara Falls, committed \$500,000 to assist the Higher Ground Christian Church with constructing 40 senior citizen housing units in a minority neighborhood.

The Niagara Region's objective as a Showcase Community is to serve as a model to link brownfields restoration to the economic, social, and ecological restoration of the Niagara River, Buffalo River, and Eighteen Mile Creek watersheds. The Showcase Community designation will allow the Coalition to leverage their dedicated brownfield resources substantially. The designation will also help focus redevelopment efforts on those ventures that will yield the highest benefit to the region's long-term economic and environmental sustainability. Of the 3,000 brownfields identified in the region, the Coalition will focus on brownfields identified within the Niagara River, Buffalo River, and Eighteen Mile Creek watersheds, as well as brownfields along the Erie Canal.

For more information on the Brownfields Showcase Communities, visit the EPA Brownfields Web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/swerosps/bf/showcase.htm>.